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Educators on march across state for better school funding

'Only hope for education is to get out in the streets,' teachers' union says

Two Bay Area educators have embarked on a 260-mile, 48-day march across the state to advocate for reinvestment in public education, budget process reform, and tax reform.

Jenn Laskin, a Watsonville K-12 teacher, and Anna Graves, a retired Berkeley adult education teacher, joined five other core marchers from around the state for the "March for California's Future."

They will be joined by thousands of other individuals along the way, event organizers said.

The march, which started in Bakersfield and will end in Sacramento on April 21, is sponsored by the California Federation of Teachers, which has partnered with a diverse group of organizations representing the faith community, public safety sector, health services, and public education.

"I believe our only hope for education is to get out in the streets and educate people about how we fund public education in California," Laskin said.

Throughout the state, marchers will meet with school boards, city councils, and countless individuals, march spokesman Steve Hopcraft said.

They plan to suggest ways to fix the budget without cutting social services and education, and will collect signatures for a ballot initiative that would require a simple majority to pass the state budget instead of a two-thirds majority.

The marchers were inspired by Cesar Chavez, who in 1966 led a march from Delano, near Bakersfield, to Sacramento to raise awareness of the plight of farm workers.

The marchers are sleeping in churches and schools and plan to highlight programs in communities across the state that have been closed or severely impacted due to budget cuts.

"As educators, we say you can teach them now or you can jail them later," said Hopcraft, whose communications company is representing the marchers. "I regard this as an extraordinary personal commitment on their part."

The marchers will likely encounter some opposition to their ideas along the way.

The Kern County Taxpayers Association has already voiced concerns about a proposed 9.9 percent oil severance tax, which the marchers are promoting as a revenue-generating measure.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger proposed the tax, and the taxpayers association has urged the marchers to drop their support of it.

The march started after a "Day of Action," in which demonstrations were held throughout the state in protest of budget cuts to public education.

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